IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

A2 1. (Amended) Hydraulic press apparatus comprising:

a lower table (1) and an upper table (2) adapted to be driven with a vertical motion against said lower plate by means of appropriate motion and position control means (3, 4, 5, 6),

a hollow cylinder (7) provided under said lower plate and arranged with its axis extending vertically, said cylinder having its upper edge (8) applied in a tight-fitting manner against the lower surface (9) of said lower plate (1),

a guide column (10) connected on top to said upper plate and having its lower end portion forming the rod of a piston (13) adapted to slide within said hollow cylinder,

a hole (14) extending throughout said lower plate (1) and adapted to accommodate said vertically sliding guide column,

an aperture (15) provided in the side surface of said hollow cylinder (7) and adapted to enable the inner volume (16), located above said piston, to communicate with hydraulic means (17) adapted to apply a hydraulic pressure within said inner volume when said piston is in its lower position, characterized in that

said guide column is provided with an inner cylindrical cavity (18) having a vertical axis and filled with hydraulic fluid, said cylindrical cavity extending into said piston (13) and coming out of the latter at the lower end portion thereof,

there is provided a plunger-type piston adapted to slide within said inner cylindrical cavity, said piston being provided with an upper cylindrical portion (20) that has such a diameter as to be able to plug said inner cavity, and with a lower portion (21) that has a smaller diameter so as to prevent it from entering into contact with the walls of said inner cylindrical cavity (18),

there is provided a through-bore (22) adapted to enable said inner cylindrical cavity (18) to communicate with said inner volume (16) when said upper cylindrical portion (20) of said plunger-type piston is situated under the level of said through-bore.

A3 4. (Amended) Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 2, characterized in that:

said upper portion (20) of said plunger-type piston is connected to said lower portion (21) thereof by means of a frusto-conical connecting portion (40),

said inner cylindrical cavity (18) is provided inside with a frusto-conical crown-like ring (23) arranged in a position below said through-bore (22) and adapted to engage said frusto-conical connecting portion so as to prevent said plunger-type piston from further displacing downwards,

and the height of said upper portion (20) of said plunger-type piston is not smaller than the difference in height between the upper edge of said through-bore (22) and said crown-like ring (23), so as to be able to plug said through-bore when said plunger-type piston is located above and in contact with said crown-like ring (23).

5. (Amended) Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 2, characterized in that

the upper edge (30) of said upper portion of said plunger-type piston has a frusto-conical shape,

said inner cylindrical cavity (18) is provided inside with a second preferably frusto-conical crown-like ring (25) arranged in a position above said through-bore and adapted to engage said upper edge (30) of said upper portion when said guide column is in its lower position.

6. (Amended) Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

7. (Amended) Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 1, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

Please add the following new claims:

A4 8. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that:

said upper portion (20) of said plunger-type piston is connected to said lower portion (21) thereof by means of a frusto-conical connecting portion (40),

said inner cylindrical cavity (18) is provided inside with a frusto-conical crown-like ring (23) arranged in a position below said through-bore (22) and adapted to engage said frusto-conical connecting portion so as to prevent said plunger-type piston from further displacing downwards,

and the height of said upper portion (20) of said plunger-type piston is not smaller than the difference in height between the upper edge of said through-bore (22) and said crown-like ring (23), so as to be able to plug said through-bore when said plunger-type piston is located above and in contact with said crown-like ring (23).

9. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that

the upper edge (30) of said upper portion of said plunger-type piston has a frusto-conical shape,

said inner cylindrical cavity (18) is provided inside with a second preferably frusto-conical crown-like ring (25) arranged in a position above said through-bore and adapted to engage said upper edge (30) of said upper portion when said guide column is in its lower position.

10. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 4, characterized in that

the upper edge (30) of said upper portion of said plunger-type piston has a frusto-conical shape,

said inner cylindrical cavity (18) is provided inside with a second preferably frusto-conical crown-like ring (25) arranged in a position above said through-bore and adapted to engage said upper edge (30) of said upper portion when said guide column is in its lower position.

11. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that

the upper edge (30) of said upper portion of said plunger-type piston has a frusto-conical shape,

said inner cylindrical cavity (18) is provided inside with a second preferably frusto-conical crown-like ring (25) arranged in a position above said through-bore and adapted to engage said upper edge (30) of said upper portion when said guide column is in its lower position.

12. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 4, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

13. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

14. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 5, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

15. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 9, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

16. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 10, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

17. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 11, characterized in that there is provided an elastic member (27) on the bottom wall (24) of the hollow cylinder (7), in such a position as to be able to fit between said lower portion (21) and said bottom wall (24).

18. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 2, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

19. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 3, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

20. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 4, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

21. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 8, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

22. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 5, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

23. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 9, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

24. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 10, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

25. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 11, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

26. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 6, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

27. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 12, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

28. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 13, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity

(18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

29. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 14, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

30. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 15, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

31. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 16, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).

32. Hydraulic press apparatus according to claim 17, characterized in that there is provided a cylindrical member (33) above the level of the hydraulic fluid in said cylindrical cavity (18), and that the volume (34) of gas above said cylindrical member is put under pressure preferably through an external conduit (35).